

Self-Observation Revisited: Focusing on Feedback Activities

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ABSTRACT

This paper observes how my feedback activities of discussion classes have changed from 2013 to 2016. I did a self-observation of the transcribed data of a lesson from each year, focusing on the length of the time spent for activities and the frequency of the teacher's and students' utterances. Following the observation, this report argues what made it possible to change feedback activities to achieve teaching and learning goals of Rikkyo University's English Discussion Course, a mandatory course for all first year students.

INTRODUCTION

Rikkyo University's English Discussion Class (EDC) gives all instructors opportunities to observe their recorded lessons as one of the core tools of their professional development. Observations let instructors see more closely into classroom activities, but it also gives them access to themselves. For example, Chak (2006) claims that self-observation helps teachers to bring awareness about their teaching principles, emotions, attempts, and achievements. According to Schön (1987), reflection-on-action allows teachers to go back to particular teaching situations and explore how they acted and why they acted the way that they did, as deep reflection requires time and distance. McCullagh (2012) also claims that teachers who engage in post-lesson self-observation will be more aware of how they may be likely to react in future situations and better prepared to search for alternative approaches.

The first observation of my recorded lesson at EDC in 2013 was useful in creating awareness of my teacher-talk, time management skills, students' reactions, and so on. There were some observed good points and enormous points to be improved for better teaching/learning outcomes. This paper focuses on the following points which needed to be fixed immediately to satisfy the EDC principles of 1) time management skills for discussion activities so that students can receive comments in a meaningful and actionable way, and 2) increasing students' involvement in feedback activities to create learner-centered learning environments. EDC follows communicative language teaching principles, which encourage creating a learner-centered learning environment. This means an instructor can provide sufficient time to create activities where students can interact with each other without teacher intervention. The first observation of 2013 clearly showed me that I could not achieve these goals because of too much teacher talk and bad time management. In other words, I had to change my activities so that students could get involved more in a feedback activity. This paper compares my first self-observation video of 2013 and the most recent one of 2016, and describes how my feedback activities have been adapted to satisfy the EDC principles stated above and to maximize students' learning outcomes.

OBSERVATION

Process

I did self-observation of recorded lesson videos from 2013 and 2016. Focusing on Discussion 1 and Discussion 2 feedback activities, I checked the length of time of each activity and transcribed my teacher talk and students' utterances. The extracted data was analyzed regarding two points: how I managed time sufficiently for feedback activities and the frequency of utterances of teacher/students' talk.

Data

In the EDC program, students have two discussions and they receive feedback activities as a post-discussion activity every lesson. Table 1 below displays the time spent for the first and the second discussion, as well as the frequency of utterances of teacher/students during feedback activities in the 2013 and 2016 lessons respectively.

Table 1. Differences between Feedback Activities Observed in 2013 and 2016.

	2013		2016	
	Discussion 1	Discussion 2	Discussion 1	Discussion 2
Number of teacher's utterances/reactions	14	15	13	6
Number of students' utterances/reactions	6	7	17	At least 20
Time required total	4 min 47 sec	2 min 38 sec	7 min	7 min
Teacher's talking time	4 min 23 sec	2 min 24 sec	2 min 12 sec	1 min 45sec
Students' talking time	24 sec	14 sec	4 min 48 sec	5 min 15 sec

Table 1 shows that I could successfully have longer time for feedback activities in 2016 compared to 2013. As the table displays, the number of students' utterances doubled from 2013 to 2016, especially in the Discussion 2 feedback activity.

DISCUSSION

What has changed my feedback styles? The first concern from the 2013 observation was a time management problem because I failed to allocate enough time for feedback activities. Following advice and comments through peer/PM-conferences in 2013 and 2014, I could find better time management skills; for example, to trim pre-discussion activities such as function presentation, practice session, to avoid station activities, to use the same lesson patterns, to avoid longer instructions and use simpler and shorter expressions. Among these strategies, I feel that using the same lesson patterns greatly helped me minimize my teacher-talk. I did not need to repeat instructions or change simpler expressions for further explanation. Some instructors or students might find it monotonous to follow the same lesson patterns every lesson; however, this strategy helps students understand the whole picture of lessons easily. Using the same patterns lets everyone in the classroom have longer time for feedback activities.

The second issue found from my 2013 observation was how to create more learner-centered feedback styles. Appendix 1 illustrates that Discussion 2 feedback from 2013 contained simple questions from the teacher and involved no meaningful or actionable feedback that students could refer to in the next lesson. There are many different ways to increase students' interactions in feedback activities. However, I personally think asking students two or three simple questions and letting them discuss in pairs for a few minutes was an effective way to increase such interaction. It is because students do not need to spend a lot of time to understand meanings of questions and they can quickly start pair work. In the observed lesson of 2016, I wrote feedback points on the board (for example, "1. Good points of your partner, 2. 1 advice for your partner for

the next lesson”), and demonstrated how students could start peer evaluation. As I had a plenty of time for this activity, I could do the demonstration. Following the demonstration, students did pair work voluntarily.

It seems that having learner-centered feedback is beneficial from students’ point of view. EDC targets students who finish the course and carries out an end-of-semester questionnaire about their learning experience. I could find some general comments from students saying that they thought the peer feedback useful because pair feedback activities let them notice what their strengths were, and the activities helped them pay better attentions to classmates’ function use and comments. This aligns with Benson (2011), Yashima (2014), and Del Hel et al’s (2015) claims that when students collaborate with others in the classroom, they can gain better learning outcomes and their learning motivation will be more positive. To enhance the benefits of collaborative learning, teachers need more support in the design and implementation of collaborative learning to translate knowledge about collaborative learning into effective practice.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines how I implemented teaching strategies to improve feedback activities to satisfy EDC teaching and learning goals. The paper observed that effective time management skills (e.g. the repetitive use of the same lesson patterns) and letting paired students discuss simple feedback questions made it possible to have more learner-centered activities in meaningful and actionable ways.

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APPENDIX A – Transcription of Discussion 2 Feedback (2013)

T	Okay, let’s stop here. Let’s stop here. Okay, so let’s check if we achieved these goals or not.
T	Did everyone speak?
Ss	Yes.
T	Yes. Okay.
T	Did everyone try to understand each other?
Ss	Yes
T	Great.
T	Did you ask many questions? (students are nodding) So so? Okay, small smile mark. (writing a small smile mark on the board)
T	Did you agree or disagree? Yes?.

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S	Yes
T	Yes. Okay big smile.
T	Did you say many opinions? What do you think? In my opinion, I think babababa. Yes?
S	Yes
T	For example, most popular way to make friends is to join club activity. Other popular idea is to talk someone sitting next to you.
T	Did you ask how come?
S	(nodding)
T	You said how come how come why why ? Nice exciting discussion.
T	Did you say because?
S	No.
T	No?

Appendix B – Transcription of Discussion 2 Feedback (2016)

T	Okay, time's up. Let's start peer feedback. We talk in pair and discuss 2 points. First, your partner's good point. You two pair, you two pair, you two pair, you to pair (pairing students). For example, You could use today's functions. Your reactions are great. Thank you for helping me. And so on. Okay?
Ss	(nodding)
T	Second. advice for the next week. For example, Yuki, you are a couch for Yossy. You give him advice. For example, next time, you can try listener side function. Or, you can ask more follow-up questions. Good points and 1 advice for next week. Pair work. Okay?
T	Okay let's start. (making a pair)
Ss	(Each pair started peer feedback. Each member of discussion has at least two utterances in this peer feedback. Below are extracted examples of utterances) Yuki: Do you want to start? Yossy: Please start. Yuki: Okay. Your good point is today's function. Many phrases. You could use agree/disagree and your ideas are interesting. Thank you. Yossy: Oh, thank you. Advice please? Yuki: Umm.... Oh! Next week, you can start discussion. Not me. Ahaha. Yossy: Next week. I start discussion. Oh my god! Thank you. Yuki: Thank you my good point? Yossy: Your good point. Good reactions. Questions. Smile! Yuki: Thank you. I like your smile, too. Advice? No advice? Yossy: More function phrase, please. For example, Can I say something? Does anyone want to comment? Before or after your comments. Okay? Yuki: Ah... I forgot. Sorry. Sorry.
T	Okay, so we have face-to-face communication to have a peer feedback. In Discussion 2, we talked about good points and bad points of online communication.
Sa	Yes.
T	You could use, umm... You could achieve many goals, and you could use many skills and functions to have a long discussion. And many people say that online communication is very very dangerous. (students are nodding)
T	For example, on Twitter, as Yuki said, very bad DM for example, Do you have a part-time job? Are you a university student? It is very very scary. We have to be careful when we use Twitter.
Ss	Yes.
T	Okay, thank you everyone. I enjoyed listening to your stories and ideas. Next week will be a fun lesson. Okay? See you soon!